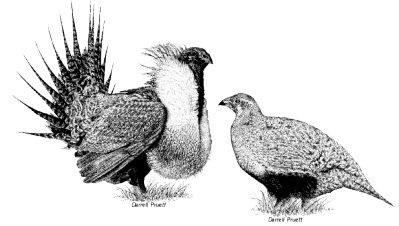


Final Meeting Summary



Date: July 10 and 11, 2008

Meeting: Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee

Location: Idaho Department of Fish and Game - Boise, Idaho

July 10, 2008

In attendance:

Donna Bennett (Owyhee LWG), Lynn Burtenshaw (Upper Snake LWG), Sam Chandler (Big Desert LWG), Ken Crane (Bureau of Land Management), Brett Dumas (Idaho Power), Dave Ellis (Challis LWG), Frank Fink (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Nate Fisher (Office of Species Conservation), Katie Fite (Western Watersheds Project), Steve Goddard (Idaho Wildlife Federation, Ada County Fish and Game League), Dan Gossett (Shoshone-Paiute Tribes), Gene Gray (West Central LWG), Tom Hemker (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Betsy Holmes (Department of Energy – Idaho), Rich Howard (Idaho Conservation League), Ron Kay (Idaho State Department of Agriculture), Justin Krajewski (Idaho Soil Conservation Commission), Angela Lafferty (Idaho Department of Lands), Paul Makela (BLM Idaho State Office), Rob Mickelsen (U.S. Forest Service), Ann Moser (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Wendy Pratt (East Idaho Uplands LWG), Peggy Redick (Challis LWG), Mike Remming (Jarbidge LWG), Alison Squier (Ziji Creative Resources Inc.), Natalie Turley (Idaho Power), Nathan Welch (North Magic Valley LWG), Kendra Womack (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and Rich Yankee (Shoshone Basin LWG).

Introductions and Review Agenda

Tom Hemker welcomed everyone to the meeting. Alison Squier reviewed the agenda and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. Lynn Burtenshaw said that he would like to talk about the mitigation/conservation issue. A discussion of the topic is on the agenda for the second day. A

report of the mitigation/conservation subcommittee was tentatively scheduled for the second day but was cancelled due to lack of response from the subcommittee.

Alison asked all the participants to introduce themselves. Wendy Pratt with the East Idaho Uplands LWG also asked that the meeting participants explain whom they represent.

SAC Business

Approve Meeting Summary from Previous SAC Meeting

Tom and Alison thanked those participants who provided comments and corrections to the April 2008 SAC meeting summary. Alison noted that she received, and incorporated comments and corrections from four individuals. The participants approved the final meeting summary.

Local Working Group and Other Updates

Meeting participants were asked to provide updates about their activities. Following are summaries of information presented by the LWG representatives and others:

- **Tom Hemker** (IDFG) – Tom said that the major activity he'd been working on in recent months was responding to the USFWS status call. All eleven states have been working to collect data. He noted that overall the process seems more organized than it was the last time around. In the context of the state's efforts, it was IDFG's job to capture OSC funded projects and information on disease outbreaks. The BLM provided most of the information on fires. WAFWA is working on a range-wide population trend report that should be done shortly.

The Western Governors met in Jackson Wyoming a few months ago. There is a west-wide strategy that calls for a special program to establish a funding mechanism for sage-grouse habitat restoration and maintenance. This would be a long-term funding strategy. The Governors discussed this idea and endorsed the concept. Stay tuned.

Idaho is forming a new LWG in the South Magic Valley; their first meeting will be July 31st. The last area that doesn't have a LWG is the Mountain Home region. Tom said he hopes to start something up there soon.

Tom noted that Joe Hinson has come to the SAC a few times to talk about CCAAs and the protection they provide for private landowners if the sage-grouse is listed. The mechanism to accomplish that has been more complicated than was initially thought. In the West Central they were trying to link public land to private land. After a year of trying to make

this work they've come to the conclusion that it is just not possible at this time. Now they are looking at doing separate agreements to try to establish some continuity.

On another note, Tom explained that every two years there is a west-wide sage-grouse workshop. This meeting has been going on for about 50 years now. When it started up it was just a few people, at the most recent meeting there were 150 people there. Tom wanted everyone to know that two years from now the next west-wide workshop will be in Twin Falls.

- **Wendy Pratt** (East Idaho Uplands LWG) – The East Idaho Uplands LWG started this winter. The LWG area has a convoluted and long border. They met in two locations for a long time using a speakerphone and it's been working pretty well. However, recently they have been getting hung up on the livestock issue and plan to meet together as one group in Lava for their next meetings to discuss livestock grazing issues. The group has good rancher representation now although it was more agency dominated earlier. They have found that there is very little data for their area. For instance, they don't know if their birds are resident or not. The country is high with lots of sagebrush.
- **Rob Mickelsen** (USFS) – The Forest Service has been gathering data for the USFWS status call. They identified about 33 USFS projects and added those to the database. That includes six land use projects that could have negative effects. There was a problem with the agency firewall that caused a delay in their submission and they had to deliver information on a jump drive by hand. In terms of a west-wide response, the USFS has sent a letter to the USFWS summarizing any changes that have occurred since 2004.

Since there was not another representative from the Curlew LWG present, Rob reported that the Curlew LWG met a week ago to talk about projects to submit. They identified two projects: a predation study (that they didn't submit) and a fence-marking project designed to test methods of marking fences. The group also talked about hunting seasons at their last meeting. The consensus regarding hunting was to support a conservative hunting season (the season had been closed in the past).

The group is working on a vegetative mapping project to attempt to look at forb, grass and sagebrush cover. They are progressing with different treatments that are being tested to restore forbs. Results will be available in two years.

The Curlew group also hosted a couple tours including one with Dr. Winward to talk about sage-grouse taxonomy and the value of sagebrush. Dr. Winward mapped plant

communities on the Curlew about 4 years ago. Since then there have been a number of fires. The forb cover mapping will be updated.

- **Sam Chandler** (Big Desert LWG) – The LWG is continuing to work on their plan. They are finished reviewing and identifying conservation actions and are getting ready to review the full document. At their last meeting they spent time going over project proposals including a project to do firebreaks. Fire is the biggest problem in their area. They been trying to plant sagebrush for a number of years. They'll be trying plugs this fall.
- **Peggy Redick** (Challis LWG) – They completed their plan in December and are trying to implement the plan. As a result they are meeting less often. The USFS completed NEPA on the riparian exclosure the group proposed a couple years ago. They are getting ready to begin construction on the Larkspur project for next year. The Custer County commissioners asked Peggy to come and give an update on the BLM efforts and the LWG's conservation plan. They wanted to know what kind of impacts there would be for Custer County if sage-grouse were listed. Peggy said that the County Commissioners didn't like some of the conservation measures identified in the LWG plan (e.g., they didn't like the recommendation to bury power lines when feasible).
- **Dave Ellis** (Challis LWG) – Dave commented that from a ranching perspective the CCAAs are going to be critical. And that it's critical that we get something in place on public lands so that there is some continuity in management.
- **Rich Yankee** (Shoshone LWG) – Rich reported that it's been a late, cold spring. This has had a negative impact on permittees since they had to rotate their livestock a lot quicker than desirable. They will be short of cover later in the season. They are working with a private individual on an exclosure (funded with HIP money) that would fence about 28 acres. The area is a significant water source for most of the winter. Burley BLM has been working on updating information on canopy cover. The data has been summarized and they will try to wrap this up this summer. The LWG will meet in late July and early August to finalize their plan.
- **Nathan Welch** (North Magic Valley LWG) – The North Magic Valley is still in the early stages of developing their plan. They are working through the conservation threats and actions. The population subcommittee is developing explicit population objectives for the planning area at different spatial scales. The group has also spent time writing comment letters on power line projects, the proposed Friedman airport expansion and the China Mountain wind project. They submitted two funding requests, which included a volunteer reimbursement project and a fencing project.

- **Dan Gossett** (Shoshone-Paiute Tribes) – Dan explained that this would be his last SAC meeting since he received a job with APHIS in Fort Collins, Colorado. Carol Perugini is the new Fish, Wildlife and Parks Director on the Duck Valley. Dan wasn't sure who would be replacing him at the SAC meetings but he thought it probably would be Carol.

He's been working on four projects involving sage-grouse. They primarily have to do with West Nile Virus (WNV) impacts. One project, that hasn't been implemented, involves restoring up to 1000 acres of grassland including shrubs. In 3.5 years the Duck Valley area has gone from a blank space on the map to an area with lost of data on leks. The declines in populations they are seeing in the area may be due to WNV, or maybe to overgrazing. What is important is that they have some data now. Using the state plan as a model, Dan wrote a conservation plan for the Duck Valley. That plan has gone to the Tribal Council as guidelines for sage-grouse management on the reservation.

So far this year there have been no mortalities due to WNV. Typically it hits at the end of July. They've got 14 birds with radios and plan to do 10 more when WNV hits. The birds they'll trap in two weeks will be swabbed for WNV. Dan's crew doesn't have the skills to draw blood so that component will not occur this year.

Dan said he is finishing the Blue Creek wetlands report. He commented that the Department of Interior (Bureau of Indian Affairs) has proposed that the tribe grow wild rice in the wetlands as an economic development project for the tribe. Dan said he counted 3,700 white ibis there last July. He'd like to see ecotourism rather than wild rice as economic development.

- **Mike Remming** (Jarbidge LWG) – At the last SAC meeting Mike reported that the group signed their finished plan in November. They hadn't met since that time and were waiting to bring a facilitator on board. They just had their first meeting with their new facilitator, Mike Pepper. Mike Remming reported that it was a very good, productive meeting. They are basically restarting by getting some new members on board to expand the group. Since the group is just getting going again they did not submit and project proposals.

Mike reported that he flew the lek routes in the Murphy Burn. Less than 50% of the leks that were active in 2007 are still active. There is just no habitat. There was one lek where birds were but there was no habitat left, Mike commented that for this reason next year there may be even less birds.

- **Gene Gray** (West Central LWG) – Gene reported that he has been doing telemetry studies of sage-grouse in the West Central area for four years now. He's compiled a report for the

first two years. He is now compiling the 2007 report. When he started counting leks in the area you had to be there the first week of March. This year he started in February, but the third week of March there was peak attendance (and 1.5 feet of snow). The population in the area is really, really down. He put radios on 17 new birds. Of those two are females - they didn't nest.

The LWG has a PhD and a Masters candidate working on an aerial photography project to correlate what they are seeing on the ground with what it looks like from the air. Another Masters student is working with Joe Hinson and the BLM on the handbook identifying preferred sage-grouse habitat.

Gene said he is planning to trap again in August and September; IDFG has said they don't want to trap any more males.

- **Ron Kay** (IDAG) – He and his staffers have been trying to go to all of the LWG meetings. He told the group about a 22-year study by Blair Walden (out of Logan, UT forage plan lab) looking at plant species survival (post fire?). The study indicated that the only species that survived were crested wheat grass and cheat grass.
- **Rich Howard** (ICL) – Rich thanked Tom, Kendra, and Tom Rinkes for the update they provided at the annual ICL retreat on sage-grouse. He said they did a really good job and encouraged a good dialog.
- **Steve Goddard** (Idaho Wildlife Federation, Ada County Fish and Game League) – Their group is working with kids from Meridian District schools on the Dry Creek project. As part of a school project the kids work on science projects and give presentations. They are doing a vegetation study on Dry Creek. The objectives are to stabilize the area, get water back in the area, and to establish vegetation. Kids go down there, stay, and collect data. The field work is being done in conjunction with BLM guidance.
- **Ann Moser** (IDFG) – She said she's been working almost entirely on the data call in recent months. She has some ideas drafted for the new, upgraded web site. She also reported that she's having trouble getting stories for the newsletter and getting LWG updates. She would like input from folks on what you'd like to see in the newsletter.
- **Donna Bennett** (Owyhee LWG) – The Owyhee LWG has met twice since the April SAC meeting in Dubois. At their May meeting they discussed Judge Winmill's decision. The County suggested having a credentialed group review all of the Owyhee LWG projects and

publish the findings and send them to Judge Winmill. Donna thanked Paul Makela for sending the revised habitat map.

The Owyhee Initiative is still a hot issue in the area. It is supposed to go to the Senate next month. Simplot holdings are not included in the initiative.

The new power line from Strike Valley to Duck Valley is nearly complete. They got around the EIS by following the road right of way.

Michelle Commons Kemner reported that the leks were hard to get to in April this year. Counts appear to be down with a 50/50 ratio of males to females.

At their last meeting they talked about project proposals. The Air Force came forward with a proposal to evaluate leks. The group is also resubmitting last year's mastication project proposal since the County didn't submit it because they thought the funds were being diverted to the Murphy Complex Fire last year.

- **Lynn Burtenshaw** – (Upper Snake LWG) – The group is still trying to recover from the death of Kent Christopher. He was one of the main people in the group. The LWG put forward three projects.

As people who attended the Dubois tour a few years ago remember, some sage-grouse are leking right on the road. One proposal is to hire people to do brush beating in select locations to create more leks off the road. The mail person drives the road and has offered for a small fee to go earlier to survey the road for sage-grouse.

For another project, the BLM wants to put stays on fences to try to make the fence more visible. About 20 sage-grouse were killed in collisions with one fence.

A genetic scientist at INEL proposed the third project. She has done studies on genetic marking in different areas in Idaho, Oregon, Nevada and Wyoming to try to figure out the genetic markings associated with various areas in order to determine where best to bring "replacement" birds from if necessary.

The LWG also discussed hunting seasons at their last meeting.

- **Paul Makela** (BLM) – Paul Makela (BLM) – The BLM completed the national sage-grouse data call response. They did an overlay habitat map looking at fire – over 600,000 acres of Key habitat burned in Idaho, during the 2003 through 2007 fire seasons. The BLM finalized an agreement between BLM, IDFG and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, for a southern

Idaho Habitat Conservation Partnership that will create an endowment to provide habitat improvement, land protection (easements, acquisitions etc.) and other project money. There are many areas where sage-grouse and elk habitat overlap. The foundation will work at bringing together other funding opportunities and partners as well.

The BLM is currently working on identifying Healthy Lands Initiative projects for this fiscal year 2009. These generally include shrubsteppe restoration, juniper and weed/invasives control, and riparian work projects. They are also continuing work on development of the sage-grouse habitat photo guide with Univ. Idaho (Dr. Eva Strand), Joe Hinson, IDFG, NRCS, and FWS. Jeff Gillan is the graduate student for the project and he has been in the field with BLM Field Office biologists getting familiar with the BLM's habitat assessment process.

As part of another project, Jack Connelly and Kerry Reese have selected a Univ. of Idaho graduate student (Bryan Stevens) to look at the impact of tall structures on sage-grouse. They will be looking at evidence of sage-grouse strikes with fences, etc., as well as impacts other structures such as power lines, communication towers, etc. The project is funded by BLM and IDFG and additional funding would be helpful if other entities are interested in participating. Paul noted that it would be good to coordinate with some of the LWG projects about fence marking (e.g., Upper Snake project) to ensure that those efforts are linked with the research effort.

BLM also participated in development of a national BLM key habitat map for use in prioritizing fire assets on a broad-scale. They used the existing Idaho Key habitat map with no changes. The Idaho BLM state director also issued an instruction memo to field staff reiterating the information in the state plan regarding fire conservation measures. In addition, Idaho BLM took the Idaho sage-grouse habitat map at the fire dispatch area level and had Field Office/District level biologists identify the highest priority areas for fire suppression. Dispatch offices will have that information for the current fire season. For the exercise, they buffered active leks by 4 miles, to help delineate the majority of potential breeding habitat. Important restoration areas (e.g. recent fire rehabilitation or other restoration projects) were also included in some high priority areas, due to the investment and need for protection from fire. The BLM doesn't have a map of seasonal habitats in Idaho yet so they couldn't break seasonal habitats out separately.

- **Frank Fink** (NRCS) – The NRCS in eleven states are working to report information to the USFWS. They responded to the data call individually by state. In Idaho, over 7,000 practices on rangeland were identified. They overlaid that information with populations and

had each field office review it. They were specifically looking at prescribed grazing. Over 70 project actions were reported (included several different projects). This included 188,000 acres in Idaho of applied or planned projects in 27 counties.

- **Justin Krajwski** (ISCC) – The state soil conservation districts held a spring meeting. At that time Nate Fisher asked for help with the data call. There is an increased awareness in the districts about sage-grouse issues and ideas about how to submit projects for funding. They are trying to get their folks to attend LWG meets to the extent possible. The program they have taking pivots out of production has been very successful and the numbers are dropping now.
- **Brett Dumas** (Idaho Power) – Brett introduced Natalie Turley with Idaho Power who will start being more involved with the SAC. She leads Idaho Power's raptor protection program. As a follow-up to the last winter meeting Brett reported that the Gateway West project public scoping meeting have been completed and the analysis of public comments is underway. The Boardman/Hemmingway project scoping is scheduled to start in August.

Brett mentioned a new fence line diverter that has been developed by Firefly LLC. The markers glow after sundown up to 10 to 12 hours for low and fog conditions. Brett will send Alison a copy of the brochure and related materials and Alison will forward those on to the SAC.

- **Ann Lafferty** (IDL) – Angela said that she has been spending lots of time the last few months gathering data for the data call. Idaho Department of Lands approached the process in two phases. First they gathered all sage-grouse habitat data, then they compared that with data gather by other agencies. Ultimately they came up with a list of 25 projects – all of those ended up being linked to other data (e.g., included in the state information or the LWG reports). They also drafted a letter that was submitted as part of the public comment. They overlaid BLM habitat data with IDL lands and have given that information to all of their field offices.
- **Betsy Holmes** (IDL) – The also participated in the data call with other agencies. They didn't have any additional data to add but they did submit a litter to USWS. They put 50 radio collars on birds.

USFWS Data Call Update (State Report)

Ann Moser and Tom Hemker provided an update on the state's efforts to respond to the USFWS data call.

June 27 was the closing date for public and agency input to the USFWS on the status review for sage-grouse. Ann explained that IDFG, the SAC, and several agencies (e.g., IDL and DOE submitted letters through the public input process). In addition, the USFWS asked federal and state agencies in the 11 western states to complete four key pieces of information. Those included:

- **Conservation Efforts Database.** The purpose of this database was to capture specific actions or project that will directly or indirectly benefit sage-grouse or their habitats. The IDFG solicited input for conservation efforts through IDFG regional biologists and LWGs. Project were divided into those that have been completed on-the-ground in the past 5 years and those projects that are planned but have not yet been implemented.
 - IDFG captured OSC and other cooperative projects. IDFG submitted information on 69 conservation efforts -- the majority of which were LWG projects funded by the OSC;
 - Other agencies submitted their own databases (e.g., NRCS captured NRSC-funded project on private and state land); and
 - Projects on IDL land were captured either in the IDFG or NRCS databases.
- **Population and Habitat Changes spreadsheet.** The purpose of this spreadsheet was to capture significant changes in sage-grouse populations and habitat since November 2004. This spreadsheet was not meant to report population trends, as WAFWA is conducting a separate range-wide analysis. IDFG and USFS jointly submitted this database. Information included:
 - Known mortalities due to WNV;
 - Changes in the sage-grouse hunting season (e.g., 2006 closure in Owyhees due to concern of WNV);
 - Loss of sage-grouse habitat due to 1 new road, 1 power line, and 1 phosphate mine;
 - Acres of key habitat lost to wildfire each year (calculated by Idaho BLM); and
 - Habitat changes due to prescribed fire on USFS land.
- **Future Land Development spreadsheet.** The purpose of this spreadsheet was to identify known negative impacts to sage-grouse and their habitats that are likely to occur from land development projects within the next several years. IDFG and USFS jointly submitted this spreadsheet, which included information on planned or proposed projects including:
 - Land disposals on USFS land;
 - 4 wind farms;

- 5 electric transmission lines;
 - 2 natural gas pipelines; and
 - 3 hard rock mines on USFS land.
- **Future Vegetation Work spreadsheet.** The purpose was to capture known future negative impacts to sage-grouse and habitat that could result from actions like prescribed fire and other habitat treatments or conversions. IDFG and USFS jointly submitted this information. The USFS provided information on:
 - 1 proposed mine exploration project; and
 - 1 proposed spring development.

USFWS Sage-grouse Status Review Update

Kendra Womack provided an update on the status review and overview of next steps.

She described the components that are part of a status review. These include:

- 5 Factor Threats Analysis;
- PECE Analysis (Policy for Evaluating Conservation Efforts);
- Significant Portion of the Range (Species may warrant listing in “all or a significant portion of their range”);
- Extinction Risk; and
- Reasonably Foreseeable Future (for sage-grouse, last decision used 30-100 years).

The 5 Factor Threats Analysis includes:

- The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of habitat or range;
- Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- Disease or predation;
- Inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; and
- Other natural or manmade factors affecting the species’ survival.

Inputs in status review:

- Feb-June 2008: Information collected through State Interagency Teams and public comments (i.e., conservation efforts, major population and habitat changes since last status review, major impacts likely to occur in the near future).
- WAFWA rangewide trend analysis (July).
- New scientific literature and studies (i.e., taxonomy, extinction risk, threats).

Possible outcomes of a status review are:

- Listing is warranted (associated proposed rule to list the species as threatened or endangered is usually issued at this time);
- Listing is not warranted (process ends); or
- Listing is warranted but precluded by other higher priority listing actions. (Under this scenario the species becomes a candidate for listing under the ESA).

What happens next?

- Team of FWS Biologists from across the range.
- Considering information collected on a rangewide scale.
 - PECE Analysis (every conservation action submitted will be considered).
 - Spatial distribution of threats across the landscape (“Component analysis” for major system drivers like fire, invasive species, energy development, infrastructure, etc.; are some areas/populations more vulnerable than others?)
- August 2008-FWS check in with court regarding status of status review.
- September/October 2008-FWS biologists will provide status recommendation to USFWS managers.
- December 2008-Status review outcome anticipated.
- Not warranted, warranted but precluded, or warranted and proposed listing rule.

Project Proposal Review and Ranking

Tom was asked to provide a summary of the status of available funding (he provided additional detail the second day). He reported that he thought there would be adequate funding to fund all the projects assuming that some might be funded through other sources and since all of the projects didn’t have to begin at the same point.

The SAC members reviewed each of the project proposals by asking a representative of the LWG to provide an overview of the project and answer any questions. Ann Moser summarized the discussion and scores applied during the subcommittee project review the previous day.

Participants also looked at project cost, match and considered the review criteria. In some cases the score were adjusted (reflected on revised spreadsheet). Two of the projects on the list were “carry over” projects from the previous year, which had already been approved for discussion. These projects were not reviewed again. In some cases the group also considered potential alternate funding sources that might supplement the USFWS funds that are dispersed by OSC.

** Denotes previously approved project from last year.*

Project 1 – Big Desert Fuel Breaks (Big Dessert LWG)

- Discussion about whether use of forage kochia was considered. Its 150 acres private; 2000 federal.
- Other funding possibilities:
 - NRCS to look into possibility of securing EQUIP Funds to help offset funding request
 - SCD Conservation improvement grants and other possible sources
 - Commission will review next week could be match
 - BLM will check on HSI portion
- ***SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request; try to find offset funds if possible***
- ***Approximate start date 4/09***

Project 2 – Big Dessert Lek Search and Documentation (Big Dessert LWG)

- Look into potential IDFG funds
- ***SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request***
- ***Approximate start date 3/09***

Project 3 – Sagebrush Seedlings Planting (Big Dessert LWG)

- Discussion regarding importance of ensuring that sagebrush is adapted to the site
- ***SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request on condition that sagebrush seedlings to be used are appropriately adapted to the site.***
- ***Approximate start date 10/08***

Project 4 – Challis Field Office Travel Plan Implementation (Challis LWG)

- If possible look into funding contribution from ORV group. Consider contacting the Blue Ribbon Coalition
- ***SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request***
- ***Approximate start date 11/08***

Project 5 – Leadville Allotment Vegetation Rehabilitation (Challis LWG)

- This is a project that was approved previously. No discussion needed.
- ***SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request (move to top of list since its last year's project)***

Project 6 – South Baldy Riparian Exclosure (Challis LWG)

- Discussion regarding whether site would be grazed (answer yes under strict terms). Fence is being maintained by permittee. Concern that cost of fence is very high.

- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request**
- **Approximate start date 10/08**

Project 7 – East Idaho Uplands Sage-grouse Telemetry (East Idaho Uplands LWG)

- Discussion about the difficulty of finding birds in this area. Tom Hemker suggested that project should be delayed until after completion of the lek search and documentation project. There are currently no lek routes.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request but conditional on completion of project 8 (below) first and locating leks**
- **Approximate start date 3/10**

Project 8 – East Idaho Uplands Lek Search and Documentation (East Idaho Uplands LWG)

- Discussion – check with Bureau of Reclamation and USFS on possibility of partnering.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request**
- **Approximate start date 3/09**

Project 9 – Curlew Fence Flagging Project (Greater Curlew Valley LWG)

- Discussion about value of coordinating with J. Connelly and K. Reese regarding their research project. Consider integrating into the project with standard criteria. Also look at effectiveness of markers.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request but conditional on trying to coordinate with J. Connelly and K. Reese study**
- **Approximate start date 9/08**

Project 10 – Post-fire Restoration of Critical Habitat for the Greater Sage-grouse (South Magic Valley LWG)

- Discussion about questions related to project. There was no one on the subcommittee call or present at the SAC meeting who could answer questions about the project. Questions:
 - Why aren't they planting sagebrush?
 - Will they control competition with cheat grass?
 - Have they looked for NRCS funding (October '09 is due date for NRCS applications) especially for fence repair following the fire?
 - What were site conditions prior to the fire?
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Table decision until SAC has a response to questions. Tom Hemker will either send out information by email and mail or convene a conference call, or add the item to October's agenda if funding timing is not pressing.**

- **10/08**

Project 11 – Seasonal Movement and Distribution of Greater Sage-grouse (South Magic Valley LWG)

- Discussion about seeing reports documenting success and outcome of previous projects and related work.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request**
- **Approximate start date 7/08**

Project 12 – SS Cattle Co. Brush management Project (SS Cattle CO.)

- Discussion - site will be surveyed with NRCS and will treat 100 acres.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request**
- **Approximate start date 10/08**

Project 13 – Upper Snake Fence Marking (Upper Snake LWG)

- Discussion about importance of making every efforts to loop in J. Connelly and K. Reese research project ASAP.
- Need to clarify what the 10k is for. Has it already been spent?
- Discussion about the use of stays versus other fence marking tools. Discussion about not marking part of the fence. Discussion about seeking opportunities to use this as part of study to compare effectiveness of various marking devices.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request**
- **Approximate start date 7/08**

Project 14 – Genetic Marking (Upper Snake LWG)

- The subcommittee and SAC felt they did not have the technical expertise to review this project and recommended that Tom ask J. Connelly to review it.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Delay decision until after J. Connelly has reviewed study. Funding not time sensitive. Review at October SAC meeting.**

Project 15 – A2 Highway Lek Identification and Mitigation (Upper Snake LWG)

- Discussion – SAC members agree this project is a “no brainer.” Consider expanding to other roads as necessary.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request**
- **Approximate start date 10/08**

Project 16 – Sage-grouse Brood Habitat Study (West Central LWG)

- Discussion included the need to develop a more strategic approach to telemetry study coordination. Consider when it is appropriate to sunset a telemetry study. How to identify priority studies.
- **SAC RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request**
- **Approximate start date 1/09**

The group initiated a discussion of project 17 but did not finish the discussion. Participants finished reviewing the remainder of the projects on the second day (Projects 17, 18, 19 and 20).

Adjourn for Day

Tom and Alison thanked everyone for their hard work and the group adjourned for the day.

July 11, 2008

In attendance:

Donna Bennett (Owyhee LWG), Lynn Burtenshaw (Upper Snake LWG), Sam Chandler (Big Desert LWG), Brett Dumas (Idaho Power), Dave Ellis (Challis LWG), Nate Fisher (Office of Species Conservation), Steve Goddard (Idaho Wildlife Federation, Ada County Fish and Game League), Dan Gossett (Shoshone-Paiute Tribes), Gene Gray (West Central LWG), Tom Hemker (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Betsy Holmes (Department of Energy – Idaho), Rich Howard (Idaho Conservation League), Ron Kay (Idaho State Department of Agriculture), Lafferty (Idaho Department of Lands), Paul Makela (BLM Idaho State Office), Ann Moser (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Wendy Pratt (East Idaho Uplands LWG), Peggy Redick (Challis LWG), Mike Remming (Jarbidge LWG), John Romero (Idaho Cattle Association), Alison Squier (Ziji Creative Resources Inc.), Natalie Turley (Idaho Power), Nathan Welch (North Magic Valley LWG), Kendra Womack (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and Rich Yankee (Shoshone Basin LWG).

Presentation: Idaho Power's Analysis of Power Lines in Relationship to Leks

Brett Dumas and Natalie Turley gave a presentation on some data on sage-grouse lek status in relation to distance from power line structures that Idaho Power has been compiling. Brett explained that the information was being presented as the impetus for a discussion. He wanted to make sure people understood that they were not drawing any conclusions from the information but

wanted to explore the potential for developing a study that would explore questions related to power lines and leks in greater detail.

He noted that once further developed the information could be very useful in thinking about which conservation measures may, or may not, be effective relative to power lines and associated development.

The issues addressed by the presentation include:

- Power line corridors provide perching and nesting substrates for raptors and ravens
- Increased concentrations of raptors and ravens may pose a threat to sage-grouse by increasing their risk to avian predations in some areas
- Sage-grouse may avoid power lines and tall structures

The goal of the study was to analyze existing data using a GIS to evaluate the interactions of power lines within Idaho Power's service territory and sage-grouse leks.

Objectives included:

- Evaluate lek status and counts in relation to distance from power line structures
- Evaluate sage-grouse leks and power line temporal information
- Evaluate landscape features relative to these actions

Brett explained that distribution lines less than 69kV are used to distribute electricity from substations to customers. Distribution lines are built in response to customer demand. And transmission lines of 69 kV or greater are used to transmit power from the power source to load centers.

The study area included Idaho Power's service territory where it interacted with known sage-grouse leks. The lek data used included:

- GIS lek coverage and lek count data provided by IDFG
- Only sites where lek counts have been conducted since 1965 were used in the analysis
- Created a new variable indicating the year that males were last observed at a lek.

They also made use of shrubmap landcover data (downloaded 2005 shrubmap landcover data from SAGEMAP; combined all sagebrush cover types to calculate acres of sagebrush within 3.2 km of lek).

In addition, they used Great Western Fire Map data from before 2004. They used all fire within the last 30 years to determine if lek site and burned within the last 30 years and to calculate the acreage within 3.2 km of a lek that had burned.

The GIS distance from a lek to the nearest power pole was calculated. The total linear distance (km) of roads within 3.2 km of the lek was calculated. The average number of males at each lek

from 2003 to 2007 was incorporated (if a lek was only surveyed one year a single count was used otherwise the average of each year surveyed was used).

They also used information gathered in a helicopter survey in April 1998 that documented raven and raptor nests and perching birds located on transmission structures associated with the Hells Canyon Complex.

Results included:

- Number of lek locations within the Idaho Power territory
- Lek status by distance category
- Lek counts relative to distance from power line
- 5-year average of lek counts relative to distance from power line
- Number of leks, and status, within 1 km of power lines categorized by years since construction
- Patterns associated with inactive leks (included: year line build, last active lek, first inactive lek, fires, agriculture)
- The study also looked at roads, percentage of area that has burned in the last 30 years within 3.2 km of lek, agriculture (e.g., percentage of area within 3.2 km of lek dominated by agriculture), sagebrush (e.g., percentage of area within 3.2 km of lek dominated by sagebrush)

Some of the suggestions put forward by SAC members included:

- Look at brand new power line e.g., CJ Strike to Riddle
- Consider that human use (e.g., ORV) may increase with power lines.
- Need to look at what hens are doing (e.g., what is productivity of nest)
- Need to look at cumulative effects on the landscape
- Consider focusing research on leks that went inactive and why
- California F&G study indicates site line may be a factor – need to look at that in a study too
- Consider evaluating telemetry data in relationship to infrastructure

Brett and Natalie said they looked forward to working with the SAC to refine a study that might be conducted in the future.

Continue Discussion: Project Proposal Review and Ranking

Before beginning the day's discussion, Tom Hemker provided additional detail regarding the available project funding. First he provided an OSC grant summary:

- \$1.8 million in grants in 6 years
- \$1.4 million spent
- \$250,000 committed

- \$15,000 unallocated
- \$200,000 + in current applications

He also provided a summary of the annual grants and total projects funded each year:

- FY-2002 grant totaled \$400,000 and was used to fund 30 projects
- FY-2003 grant totaled \$298,000 and was used to fund 15 projects
- FY-2004 grant totaled \$296,303 and was used to fund 28 projects
- FY-2005 grant totaled \$295,832 and was used to fund 27 projects
- FY-2006 grant totaled \$295,586 and was used to fund 27 projects
- FY-2007 grant totaled \$0 and was used to fund 0 projects
- FY-2008 grant totaled \$246,100

The group returned to the discussion of project proposals:

Project 17 – Square Lake Fencing Project (North Magic Valley LWG)

- Most of the discussion centered on the inclusion of the water component in the project. SAC participants felt the project would not succeed (i.e., cattle would get to the riparian area and water without inclusion of a water supply on the northern allotment). In addition, at least one SAC member was concerned that the project sponsor, Wood River Land Trust, did not contribute their own funds as part of the project proposal. Participants also discussed the pros and cons of allowing grazing in a fencing enclosure (e.g., can be beneficial in terms of controlling weeds and invasives; or can be detrimental in terms of damaging the riparian area). Participants expressed concern about making a recommendation contrary to that of the LWG (i.e., LWG endorsed project with stipulation that water component that had originally been included in the project be removed) however, SAC members felt very strongly that the project would fail without some means to provide water to the northern allotment.
- ***RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request plus funds for water component (\$23,428 total), contingent on 1) inclusion of water component, and 2) approval of LWG to proceed with water component.***
- ***Approximate start date 9/08***

Project 18 – Reimbursement of Private Vehicle Use (North Magic Valley LWG)

- Discussion included the desire by members of the SAC to ensure that the funds would be used for expenses directly related to lek counts.
- ***RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request***
- ***Approximate start date 5/09***

Project 19 – Post Murphy Fire Sage-grouse Investigation (Owyhee LWG)

- ***RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request***
- ***Approximate start date 3/09***

* Project 20 – Sage-grouse Habitat Improvements (Owyhee LWG)

- This project was approved in 2007.
- ***RECOMMENDATION: Fund full request, previously approved project.***

Attachment 1 includes the full table of project scores and ranking.

The SAC members suggested and discussed a number of ways to improve future solicitation processes. Tom and Alison noted that the last solicitation didn't follow some of the guidelines established the previous year (e.g., proposals were supposed to be sent two weeks before the subcommittee review, there was supposed to be a cover letter explaining the process, review criteria were supposed to be included).

The SAC ideas to improving future project solicitation processes and criteria included:

- Send a cover letter next time clearly defining the process, timeline, who to send things to, reminding people that they need to include a signed copy of the landowner/permittee form, and including the review criteria with the application form.
- Review the criteria – need to consider whether habitat projects should receive a higher score.
- Provide copies of proposals to all the SAC ahead of time. Need to have enough time to review the project proposals before meeting (this year the subcommittee only had one day).
- When providing a summary of the proposals for the subcommittee and/or SAC to review include a column(s) that lists cost match.
- Require copies of existing project progress reports...consider having the SAC receive reports/presentations on project progress, success etc. the day before they review the projects.
- Consider eliminating the subcommittee review and review all the projects with the full SAC.

Presentation: Paul Kjellander on Energy Issues

At the April SAC meeting in Dubois, participants talked about the questions of mitigation and conservation crediting. At that time, Nate Fisher suggested that the group invite Paul Kjellander the administrator of Idaho's Office of Energy Resources to come and talk about conservation and mitigation.

Governor Butch Otter appointed Paul Kjellander to head the new Idaho Office of Energy Resources in October 2007. Prior to being appointed to head the Office of Energy Resources, Kjellander, a former three-term Republican member of the Idaho House of Representatives, had served on the three-member Public Utility Commission since January 1999.

Before being appointed to the PUC, Kjellander was director of Boise State University's College of Applied Technology Distance Learning, interim program head of broadcast technology, station manager of BSU Radio Network, director of the Special Projects Unit for BSU Radio, executive producer/newscaster for BSU Radio and director of News and Public Affairs. He has a master's degree in telecommunications from Ohio University.

He explained that the first step toward responding to our state's energy challenges is realizing they exist. The high price of gasoline, rising utility bills and the fact that Idaho imports the majority of its total energy needs point to the urgent need for action. He noted that Idaho has seen tremendous growth, and the state's ability to manage it with the existing energy infrastructure is nearing capacity. He said that Idahoans have to be prepared to accommodate those projects that are economically feasible and cost-effective.

He also noted that energy-related developers are showing significant interest in Idaho. Proposed projects include nuclear, natural gas generators, wind, geothermal, biomass, methane digesters, pump storage hydro, interstate pipelines and transmission. He commented that Wall Street has sent a clear message that investors will not risk their money on carbon-emitting resources. We're already seeing the impact in Idaho he said, for example, Idaho Power and Rocky Mountain Power each had previously proposed building coal-fired generators in Idaho. Both utilities have scrapped those plans.

Kjellander argued that wind and solar are still too expensive relative to what Idahoans currently pay for electricity. Therefore, while they have some role to play, the primary emphasis in Idaho needs to be on nuclear and natural gas development. He also talked about the limitations of where wind energy can be located i.e., it has to be where the wind is.

Gov. Butch Otter has put forward the 25 by '25 initiative under the Office of Energy Resources. The goal is to have 25 percent of Idaho's energy provided by renewable resources by the year 2025.

In response to specific questions about mitigation for power development including things like transmission lines Kjellander acknowledged that it was a very complex and difficult issues. He said that the challenge is to provide some predictability for power companies so that they can plan for costs and so that there is consistency across the region. He also talked about the need for trade offs and recognition that we all benefit from the transmission lines that comprise the energy grid even those transmission lines may not be bringing energy directly to Idaho.

Kjellander also spoke about the need to balance mitigation costs with rising power rates.

Hunting Season Discussion

Tom asked each of the LWGs to report on the outcome of their LWG discussions regarding recommendations for the 2008 sage-grouse season. Tom will provide a summary of all the recommendations as a follow-up to the meeting.

Next SAC Meeting: Agenda, Location and Time

The next SAC meeting is October 7 and 8, 2008. The meeting will take place in Twin Falls (specific location and times to be determined). Tentative agenda items include:

- Tour of Murphy Complex Fire and China Mountain Wind Power site
- Funding follow-up
 - Status of funds (how much)
 - Follow-up on answers to questions about select projects and differed decisions
- CCAA's - Updates on process, role of SAC/LWGs, statewide CCAA
- Significant Portion of the Range presentation – Tom Perry with OSC
- USFWS status review update
- Fire season update
- SAC TAT report
 - Solicitation process improvements
 - Telemetry strategy
- Coordination on fence deterrent research by Jack Connolly and Kerry Reese
- WNV update (season results as part of LWG updates)
- Conservation/Mitigation Crediting subcommittee report
- Possible presentation from Mike Pellant and Dave Pick on cheat grass

Confirm Agreements, Assignments and Follow-up Actions

Follow-up actions:

- Tom Hemker to send copy of WAFWA trend report to SAC (or post on web site with notice; send hard copy to Steve Goddard) – *ASAP*
- Tom Hemker to post abstracts of papers from recent west wide sage-grouse papers on IDFG web site (send hard copies to Steve Goddard) - *ASAP*
- Alison to send link to China Mountain Wind Project EIS scoping – *ASAP*
 - Here is the link:
http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/planning/china_mountain_wind.html
- Alison/Tom – For future SAC meeting invite Mike Pellant and Dave Pike (?) to come and give a presentation on cheat grass (Paul Makela suggested)

- All – Send recommendations for stories/content in the SAC newsletter to Ann Moser – *ASAP*
- Brett Dumas - Brett send Alison a copy of a brochure and related materials about the new Firefly fence diverter and Alison will forward those on to the SAC – *ASAP if possible*
- Kendra Womack – Send Alison copy of PowerPoint for inclusion with meeting summary – *ASAP*
- SAC TAT (and Tom Hemker) – *for October meeting*
 - Develop strategy regarding telemetry projects e.g., how to prioritize, sun setting, better follow through
 - SAC TAT will review ideas and develop recommendations for further improving project solicitation process, criteria, and notification. Items discussed at the SAC meeting included:
 - Send a cover letter next time clearly defining the process, timeline, who to send things to, reminding people that they need to include a signed copy of the landowner/permittee form, and including the review criteria with the application form
 - Review the criteria – need to consider whether habitat projects should receive a higher score
 - Need to have enough time to review the project proposals before meeting (this year the subcommittee only had one day)
 - When providing a summary of the proposals for the subcommittee and/or SAC to review include a column(s) that lists match
 - Provide copies of proposals to all the SAC ahead of time
 - Require copies of progress reports...consider having the SAC receive reports/presentations on project progress, success etc. the day before they review the projects
 - Consider eliminating the subcommittee review and review all the projects with the full SAC.
- Tom Hemker to follow-up with Jack Connelly on review of genetics proposal
- Tom Hemker will report back to the SAC in October regarding the status of funding and projects selected for funding (also follow-up on deferred projects) – at October meeting
- In addition, John Romero and Tom Hemker will look into the CSI project proposal process and see if any of the SAC project proposal could be funded with CSI funds – *at October meeting*
- Paul Makela to help coordinate with researchers on fence studies - *ASAP*
- Tom Hemker will provide a summary of all the LWG recommendations for the 2008 sage-grouse season to the SAC - *ASAP*

Adjourn

Tom Hemker thanked everyone for coming and adjourned the meeting.